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ABSTRACT

The role of collaborative research to support curriculum change is discussed, drawing on experiences with the Australian Adult Migrant English Program during a period of extensive change. The research undertaken was to assess the impact of competency-based curriculum on classroom practice and course design. The research project engaged 30 teacher-researchers with diverse perspectives in assessment of the changes' impact while, rather than after, they occurred. Because the researchers were in four territories, a network was established linking researchers, project organizers, and local coordinators. In the first phase, researchers documented their course planning and day-to-day decision-making in an ethnographic manner. In the second phase, themes were refined into four major research areas: selection and sequencing of content; integration of grammar teaching into task planning and classroom processes; conducting competency-based assessment; and documentation of learners' understanding of and responses to competency-based teaching. Researchers chose their research focus and data collection methods, and shared their findings in collaborative discussion. The method is found to contribute significantly to teacher-researchers' professional development. Anecdotal information and teacher comments illustrate the utility of the method. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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Teachers' Voices: Curriculum design and change

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TEACHERS' VOICES: CURRICULUM DESIGN AND CHANGE

Anne Burns

INTRODUCTION

In this talk I want to argue for the role of collaborative action research in supporting the implementation of institutional curriculum change. To do this I will draw on the voices of teacher-researchers with whom I worked in the Australian Adult Migrant English Program, at a time when massive curriculum changes occurred nationally in this program.

I would like to introduce you to this changing educational context, and to some of the curriculum issues which arose, through the comments of one of the teachers with whom I worked. The action research we carried out investigated the impact of new competency-based curriculum frameworks on classroom practice and course design. The teacher said:

> When the opportunity presented itself in mid 1993 for me to be involved in a project on course design within a comptency-based curriculum, I jumped at the chance. I had been involved in the trialling of the Certificate in Spoken and Written English in early 1993 and it raised a lot of issues for me. As a classroom teacher I was concerned about the practicalities of implementation, in particular the new demands on my time. There were theoretical implications, since the document is based on a theory of language which I was only beginning to understand. Politically, too, I was concerned about the implications for learners of the path the Adult Migrant English Service had taken in connecting language to the wider context of competency-based vocational education and training as part of the National Training Reform Agenda. I was also concerned about the impact on learners of choices of course content and methodology that remained my responsibility. I therefore welcomed the opportunity to clarify some of these issues and a closer investigation of my course design practices in collaboration with other practitioners and researchers seemed an interesting way to proceed.

The teacher's comments point to a number of issues: her own immediate classroom concerns - course content, methodology, the demands on her time of the new curriculum - but also her perceptions of a mismatch between her own practical theories and knowledge and those which curriculum documents are inevitably based upon, be it implicitly or explicitly - in this case 'a theory of language I was only beginning to understand'. There are also other concerns emerging from the broader political, economic and educational pressures which commonly surround large-scale curriculum change, and the ideological clashes which may occur between these influences and teachers' own beliefs about

education.

The teacher's comments remind us of two extremely important factors: that curriculum change is not a neutral or one-off event but a long-term process. It involves crucially the values, beliefs and ideologies of the participants in the change and the extent to which the change can be accommodated within their individual values. The comments also remind us that curriculum change is highly complex and dynamic. Institutions undertaking curriculum change and wanting it to be effective need to consider the long-term preparation, planning, implementation and evaluation that is needed as educators at different levels of the system learn how to 'do' the change.

Why then do I argue for collaborative action research as an important means of support in the implementation of large-scale change. Again, the teacher's remarks provide a clue. Curriculum change challenges the practices we have evolved and developed in the privacy of our own classrooms and urges us to adopt new ways. It asks us to assume new identities as teachers. For many teachers typically this a challenging and solitary undertaking. Typically, they are required to cope with change at the individual classroom level. But educational change is an interaction of complex large and small scale processes which affect social and educational systems, teaching institutions and individual teachers. As this teacher suggests articulating your own perspectives on change in collaboration with other stakeholders offers a way of problematising the complexities of change together and then finding common practical ways to proceed. It is the practical issues that I intend to focus on in this paper.

THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Let me now turn to the educational context which is the subject of my talk. The AMEP is a large-scale English language program for non-English speaking immigrants to Australia with settlement language needs. This Program is funded by the Australian Government and courses are offered nationally to immigrants within their first three years of residence in Australia. In recent years there have been considerable changes in the way this program operates. These changes are linked to the Government's National Training Reform Agenda which has placed a much greater emphasis on vocational and work-related education. They include:

- a shift from an autonomous and decentralised curriculum system to one based on accountability and reporting on learning outcomes
- the introduction of certification reflecting learners' achievement at various defined stages
- the introduction of competency-based curriculum frameworks
- the assesssment of learners according to competencies identified in the framework rather than overall language proficiency
- the development, design and teaching of courses within an educational

- 'pathways' defined by the curriculum frameworks
- the restriction of enrolment entitlements to 510 hours of instruction

At a national level, the AMEP responded to these political pressures by introducing competency-based and accredited curriculum frameworks, the most important of which has been *The Certificate in Spoken and Written English* (CSWE) (Hagan et al 1993) to which the teacher referred in her comments.

The linguistic theory on which this document is based is a functional and social theory of language. It is based on Halliday's functional linguistics which takes the whole *text* rather than the *sentence* as the unit of linguistic analysis (Halliday 1978, 1985). It therefore requires teachers to identify the kind of texts they will teach and in their teaching to consider the grammar and linguistic features of these texts.

This Certificate was widely introduced into the AMEP in 1993. It incorporated three learning Stages (roughly equivalent to beginner, post-beginner and lower intermediate levels). At each Stage it set out profiles of language learning competency to be achieved by the learners across four areas:

- knowledge and learning
- oral interaction
- reading
- writing

The competencies are further elaborated as elements, performance criteria and condition statements (range of variables) (Australian National Training Board (1992). Let me give you as an example a writing competency description from Stage 2, the post-beginner Stage of the Certificate:

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

The introduction of a competency-based curriculum had enormous implications for the AMEP. It emerged from political and educational necessity. But it also emerged from a growing recognition that there were limitations to the highly decentralised, process-oriented, individualised classroom approaches which had been the mainstay of AMEP curriculum theory, policy and practice throughout much of the 1980s.

The Certificate, which was trialled and then implemented in 1993, was a deliberate and planned shift in curriculum orientation. It was the culmination of a process of curriculum change which had begun in the late 1980s with a National AMEP Curriculum Project (Burton and Nunan, 1988) and continued in 1992 by the development of a more coherent Learner Pathway system (Colman, 1991; Lipa, 1992).

The Certificate built on this earlier curriculum work, and also took in the need for

links to national educational and training initiatives (Burns and Hood, 1994; Hagan, 1994).

For most teachers, the rapid and wholesale adoption of the new curriculum documents was very challenging. They had become accustomed to the individualistic and progressive curriculum institutionalised in the AMEP throughout the 1980s. Not surprisingly reactions were highly varied. They ranged from an indictment of the documents as playing to political and economic rationalist agendas, rather than to educational agendas, to welcome, acceptance and relief that finally teachers were being given an explicit basis for course planning, teaching and assessing.

ACTION RESEARCH IN THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

In June 1993, shortly after the introduction of competency-based curricula into the AMEP, together with my co-researcher Sue Hood from the NSW AMES, I initiated a major action rsearch project on behalf of the National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research (NCELTR) at Macquarie University, Sydney where I work. The aim of the project was to investigate the impact of the curriculum initiatives on teachers' course design and classroom practices.

In his work on educational change (1982, 1992) Fullan suggests that change needs to be seen, not as an event but as a process. In this process there are no 'hard-and-fast rules', but rather 'a number of suggestions or implications' which need to be set against the contextual constraints of local situations.
In these dynamic circumstances, effective curriculum change involves placing a high priority on the people involved, on their perspectives and their behaviour in response to the change. It involves listening to the values, beliefs and reactions of those most directly concerned and exploring with them workable solutions to emerging issues and problems (see Corbel, Bottomley and Dalton, 1994 for an account of responses to curriculum change in AMES Victoria).

In my view, collaborative action research is highly suited to processes of educational change for a number of reasons. First, it engages the different views and perspectives of those implementing the changes *during rather than after the event*. Second, it responds to real practical and theoretical issues within the the actual teaching context in an immediate and participatory way. Next, because it engages teachers actively and critically in what Allwright and Bailey refer to as 'exploratory teaching' (Allwright and Bailey, 1991), it also allows for a creative and dynamic interpretation of the new curriculum in the classroom, within the institutional framework. Heeding teachers' critical and reflective responses to implementation affirms the importance of their role as the institution adopts the change. Finally, the feedback from teachers implementing the new curriculum provides opportunities for administrators and curriculum developers to incorporate the teachers' practical experiences into future curriculum policy.

Apart from its relevance to the process of curriculum change, in my view, action research is also a viable research approach to the evaluation of change. This is

because it:

- involves a systematic form of investigation which incorporates the essential research components: a) a question, problem or hypothesis; b) data collection c) analysis or interpretation (Nunan, 1993)
- is 'grounded' in the actual social and educational context of the classroom (Glaser and Strauss, 19, van Lier, 1988)
- involves multidimensional data collection methods, allowing for 'triangulation' of the findings (Brindley, 1990)
- responds to pressing educational and institutional questions (Somekh, 1991; Burns, 1994)
- indicates teachers' professional development support needs (Burns and Hood, 1994)
- provides pedagogical input into language teaching research and theory (Bartlett, 1990)
- provides collaborative partnershipsbetween teachers and researchers (Hammond, 1989)
- provides data on what is occurring as a result of the introduction of change (Bottomley, Dalton and Corbel, 1994)

In the NCELTR project, the specific questions we set out to explore through the project were:

1 What issues and concerns emerge for teachers as they plan and implement a competency-based curriculum?

2 How are teachers' planning processes realised in the classroom?

3 What kinds of course design decisions are teachers making and what beliefs or philosophies underlie these decisions?

4 Can models and principles of competency-based course design be identified to help other teachers?

5 What impact does participation in action research have on teachers' professional development?

Over the twelve months of the project, thirty teachers in the states of New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia participated. A major challenge for us was to develop a collaborative model which could operate at a broad institutional level but also allow teachers from a number of locations across Australia to participate. Although several of these teachers worked for the same state-based program, they were spread across many different teaching centres. Given the time and large distances involved in bringing together participants from four different states, we needed to develop a way of enabling them to conduct individual investigations while at the same time integrating the processes of data collection and analysis for collaborative purposes.

The approach we developed involved a network, based on what I have come to call 'devolved participation'. This brought together various players in collaborative groups: the researchers and project organisers; local project coordinators; and participating teacher-researchers. Each of these groups had differing but complementary roles which evolved and interacted in dynamic ways as the project progressed.

In the first phase of the research rather than focusing on an individual pedagogical question or area, the teachers documented their course planning and day to day decision making in an open and general way (van Lier 1988), reminiscent of an ethnographic approach. They then came together to discuss common emerging themes, in the group meetings.

In the second phase of the project, these themes were refined into four major areas for further research:

* the selection and sequencing of content
* the integration of grammar teaching into task planning and classroom processes
* conducting competency-based assessment
* the documentation of learners' understanding and responses to competency-based teaching.

This second phase of the research was characterised by the teachers' individual choices of research focus and data collection methods within these thematic areas. At the same time there were opporuntities to collaborate further by discussing and problematising their findings in group meetings.

The teachers played a vital individual and collective role in the project, identifying critical classroom and course design issues, working with us to refine the emerging themes into more specific research questions and systematically collecting and analysing the various forms of data. They also shared information on the project with their learners - in some cases involving the learners in data collection and analysis - and with other teachers at their centres, sometimes drawing them into the project as additional participants and data analysts.

The contributions the teachers made at group discussions with other teachers, coordinators and researchers were central to the project. At these meetings, the teachers offered critical insights on numerous aspects of classroom practice for which new teaching approaches were now required. Because of the systematic data collection they had undertaken, they were in a strong position to suggest practical solutions and recommendations which could be considered at an institutional level and could channel these through the local project coordinators and researchers. These collaborative discussions also allowed for input by the researchers, and from other state project groups, which provided for interstate comparison, generalisation and the further building of collective theories and models for competency-based teaching practice.

The teachers collected various forms of data, such as classroom observations,

recordings and transcriptions, interviews, teaching logs, surveys, self-reports and samples of students' work. They also wrote up personal contributions to the project. These took the form of descriptions of units of work, samples of teaching materials and interpretations of how and why they adapted them, accounts of competency-based assessment procedures and tasks and personal reflections on conducting action research. Several of these accounts have since been published by NCELTR in the volume Teachers' Voices: Exploring course design in a changing curriculum (Burns and Hood, 1995).

CURRICULUM CHANGE AND COMPETENCY-BASED COURSE DESIGN

I will turn now to what we found and will illutrate my comments with data from the project.

The most striking overall finding of the project was that, despite the introduction of a curriculum approach which has been criticised as being behaviourist and reductionist (Auerbach, 1986), there was much evidence of the continuity of a rich diversity of course design practices, in terms of the teachers' approaches, methods and content. Rather than being compromised, 'the negotiated, needs-based, learner-centred curriculum' which had characterised the AMEP curriculum, appears to have been reconceptualised within a competency-based model. For reasons of time, I will focus in the discussion below on three of the factors which relate to this diversity (see Hood, 1994 and Hood and Burns, 1994 for a fuller account):

- the phase of implementation and the teacher's level of familiarity with the curriculum documents
- the teacher's skills and experience (ideological or theoretical position, level of knowledge of the theory underpinning the curriculum, and personal orientation to teaching)
- operational demands related to the kind of program and the learner profiles

The phase of implementation

As the research took place over a year, it was possible to observe shifting responses from the early phases of familiarisation to later periods of greater consolidation. In the early stages, the teacher's concerns focused particularly around the question of assessment. Competency-based curricula are based on the need to conduct continuing and formal assessment of the learners' achievements. This situation had been virtually unknown in previous course design and a number of assessment issues became prominent: the greater institutional demands for formal assessment; whether formal assessment for adult ESL learners was relevant and fair; the increased time spent on assessment rather than on 'teaching'; the change in relationship with learners

that had been imposed by assessment; and the validity and reliability of the assessment tasks being used. Initially there was a tendency within many teaching centres to adopt a 'checklist' approach or to arbitrarily teach and test within a course, only certain combinations of competencies. The following comment from one of the early project discussions is typical:

> 'I tended to [do] block assessment and I'm not sure about that any more because it flattens the class and it flattens me and I find it a bit of a...it changes our relationship...so maybe I should integrate it more across the term. I'm not sure about that because I also don't like to keep channelling activities towards assessment all the time, so...'

As the project proceeded, the overriding concern with assessment was less in evidence. The teachers became increasingly reconciled to conducting formal assessment procedures and reverted to considering other course design issues, such as negotiating course objectives and content with their learners; explaining and consulting with learners about competency-based learning processes; responding in an ongoing way to learners' needs; integrating content areas specifically requested by the learners; incorporating the teaching of grammar into the text-based approach adopted in the curriculum documents; and selecting and sequencing tasks and materials.

Michael Carroll (1994) one of the South Australian teachers in the project, describes the marked shift in emphasis occurring amongst teachers at his centre:

> From the discussions I had with others in the project, this [the time required to conduct assessments] was certainly also the general perception of many of the teachers in our teaching centres who taught competency-based courses over the year and who were still getting used to the increased focus on assessment in such courses. It was certainly considered to be a problem when the course was driven by the need to complete the assessments as was partly the case in this course [during which he conducted the action research]. However, as teachers worked with the competency framework, they began to look for ways to circumvent this problem such as integrating the assessment tasks with the planning of sequences of learning activities, so that one unit of work is used to assess several competencies.

The 'integrated approach' suggested in Michael's comments was adopted increasingly, as teachers looked less towards the teaching of discrete competencies and more towards comparisons and similarities across several competencies. In effect, teachers sought ways of incorporating underlying linguistic and learning skills holistically across a number of classroom tasks and exploiting the transferability of competencies across these tasks.

The skills and experience of the teacher

Changes in course design practices were determined by a number of factors: the individual teacher's skills and experience; her own ideological or theoretical position; her knowledge of the systemic linguistic theory underpinning the curriculum and her personal orientation to teaching. In general competency-based principles were unfamiliar to all the teachers, but they were well versed in the concepts of learner-centred course design, which had been the major focus of intense professional development and curriculum renewal in the AMEP for the previous decade (see Dalton and Bottomley 1994).

Initially, teachers who were highly oriented towards the progressive pedagogy of the 1980s, tended to feel most constrained by the specifications of the competency-based curriculum documents. These teachers continued to place their values on a high degree of learner participation and on an unstructured evolution of course content determined by the learners' wishes and their own immediate input. In terms of methodology they also showed strong preferences for task-focused, deductive and discovery learning approaches. Other teachers while not denying the importance of learner-centredness, welcomed the 'post-progressive' approach implicit in the documents. They referred to such aspects as the attention given to explicit teaching, the focus on language form as well as on function, the concentration on written as well as spoken language development and the more highly structured requirements of competency-based assessment. For yet other teachers, the change to competency-based approaches coincided with a critique of their own teaching practices. This emerged from their frustration with what they saw as too loosely structured communicative approaches, or from a desire to know more about the use of functional grammar as a way of framing text-based syllabus content and incorporating socio-cultural perspectives on language learning.

This diversity can perhaps be illustrated by the contrast in the styles of two teachers who worked in the same teaching centre. They were both highly reflective teachers and shared a common interest in the theoretical principles and approaches underlying the curriculum. But they differed considerably in their orientation to planning and in their personal beliefs about the role of the teacher. Teacher A preferred a very organised and well-documented course and lesson plan, which included: a sequence of topics; how these topics were related to particular competencies; which competencies would be assessed at which point of the course; and the resources to be used. Her teaching plan is reproduced below:

INSERT TABLE 1

Teacher A commented on this plan:

> 'On the left are the topics covered in particular weeks of the course. Orientation and Transport; Animals and the Zoo (requested by the students); Education and Goal clarification and Describing Places.
>
> On the right are described the kinds of activities used to develop students' awareness of and ability to write effective reports. By week eight or nine, I was ready to assess students formally. However, weeks nine and ten allowed for another opportunity to assess students if necessary.'

Teacher B on the other hand approached course planning in what she described as a 'dynamic' way. Her lesson plans were unrecorded and task content was spontaneously selected in consultation with her learners to whom she felt a responsibility to be continually responsive as the course proceeded. Underlying her teaching approach were what she described as 'strands', which she built on to create units of work. These strands consisted of:

- the theme of Australiana
- current affairs topics, especially those with a political, gender or ethnicity focus
- text types related to competencies
- the repetition of teaching techniques, e.g. using a dictogloss

She commented:

> In my mind I see a series of blocks being built upon, but I'm concerned about whether I've communicated that to the students. I feel a bit that I'm planning on a day-to day basis - I don't get enough time to really plan things - maybe next course when I've got materials, I'll have more time to do planning.

For Teacher A, who was already highly organised and experienced as well as familiar with the underlying functional linguistic theory, the Certificate 'provided a framework for and extended my current teaching'. Teacher B on the other hand said that 'as the course progressed and I learned more about functional grammar, I had a much clearer picture of what I was doing' and 'I was able to clarify the principles that drove my course design process... and work a little more systematically with these elements.'

The overall picture that emerges is that in response to large-scale change teachers will inevitably draw on personally significant factors to do with their individual teaching skills, experience with different learner groups and underlying theories and beliefs about teaching. Curriculum change then becomes a shifting process of solving what Allwright and Bailey (1991) have referred to as 'the local

puzzle' of new ways of teaching.

Operational demands: programs and learner profiles

Course design practices also depended on the profiles of the learners and the kinds of programs taught. The profiles included the curriculum Stage in which the learners were enrolled and whether they were in an initial or subsequent course; and the type of course related to social, further study, vocational or labour market goals.

The curriculum Stage and whether the learners were beginners or more advanced was a key factor in determining how teachers planned their courses. For example, Margaret Carew a project teacher from Victoria, discussed the factors she needed to consider in relation to her 'slow' (Band A) class at Stage 1. Her group was composed of learners with limited or non-Roman script first language literacy or with minimal educational experiences. Some of them, like Abdullah, a student from Bosnia, had also suffered recent trauma.

> The group was considered to be homogeneous. They were referred to as the 'slow learners' or the 'literacy focus learners'. It would be difficult to teach them the competencies I was told, but at least they were 'homogeneous, all in the same boat.'
>
> I soon found however that the learners were far from homogeneous and in my efforts to cope I had to draw on my experiences, when as a new teacher in AMES in 1987, I was given a beginners' class as mixed as this one in terms of educational background. I had then tried to deal with the problem by organising learner groupings within the class.

As a result of her action research, Margaret based her decisions for teaching the group on: observing the learners carefully and attempting to clarify whether the nature of learning problems related to educational or script factors; documenting and analysing the nature of their different learning strategies and assisting them to develop effective strategies; making a decision to inform the learners about the competencies they were being assessed on and developing simple and effective ways to impart this information; selecting and developing tasks which would encourage effective learning and enable the students to achieve the competencies (see Carew, 1994 for a full account).

Specifically-focused programs, such as those where students were taught to a specified syllabus, provoked other types of course design responses, as this comment from Ann Beales, a teacher working in an English in the Workplace Program (EWP) highlights:

> Our funding demands that we use a tripartite approach, that we try to develop courses with work personnel and the unions with student representatives and then with language specialists. So thinking about that

I did three things...I should also say that our course have to be developed over whatever the length of the course is... before you start you have an initial tripartite meeting where the company talks about their needs, the union might offer something, there is a student representative there and then there is us. We might offer something, they will change the content around, they may change sequencing around, then the course is written and we start to teach it, and then it is reviewed at various stages.
(see Beales 1994 for an account of selecting and sequencing content)

ACTION RESEARCH AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

I would like to comment now on what I see as the benefits of collaborative action research in curriclum change and professional growth.

I will preface these remarks however by commenting that it would be naive to suggest that conducting collaborative action research is undemanding. The teachers in our project pointed to numerous disadvantages and difficulties, including the considerable demands on their time, the tedium of documenting and analysing the data, making decisions about methods, the additional work imposed on an already busy teaching schedule and the long-term commitment required.

Nevertheless, the evaluations we received suggests that overwhelmingly teachers endorse collaborative action research. One teacher referred to it as 'a powerful form of professional development', while numerous other comments suggested that ultimately the critical awareness it engenders outweigh the disadvantages.

The teachers' comments pointed to the capacity of action research to create an intimate engagement with practice as well as to resonate with the realities of a significant curriculum change, as one of its major strengths.

'It made me evaluate what I was doing in my classes. I think I have become more methodical in the way I approach assessment and in my explanation to the class, not in *what* I do (which is much the same) but *how*'.

'It gave me an opportunity to *undertake* action research and to learn about this method as it related to my teaching.'

'It gives teachers an opportunity to reflect on the decisions behind what they do. As well it helps provide a foundation for further developing the curriculum.'

Collaboration with other teachers was seen as a significant benefit personally and a key element in generating solutions to changing institutional demands.

'It gave me an opportunity to meet with others outside the centre, to listen

to their ideas and their methods of solving problems which seem to be common to all.'

'Collaboration: discussion was most worthwhile - broadening perspectives, feedback, reinforcement and support.'

Other comments related to the sense of personal growth teachers had experienced.

'I felt good to be part of a project again. I liked having the time and direction to reflect on what I was doing and why.'

'It was fun! When you're feeling pretty jaded by college and state bureaucracy, it's nice to stretch the brain a bit.'

'Writing up - time for reflection, depth of perspective.'

'I felt a degree of personal satisfaction once I collected the data and completed the write up - a feeling that I had challenged myself and was able to meet the challenge to a certain extent.'

Increased self-awareness and personal insight was also valued.

'Self-analysis - examining strengths and weaknesses - reaffirming commitment to principles of teaching.'

'I was surprised by the responses from a questionnaire I gave the students and it was interesting for me to write this up.'

Some teacher also suggested that they could now understand the reasons and need for institutional change more explicitly.

'It clarified important issues from outside the classroom.'

'It gave me a great feeling of being part of a progression, rather than just fulfilling the teaching requirements of a particular Stage.'

CONCLUSION

Collaborative institutional models of action research should, I would argue, be harnessed as a powerful means of understanding the nature of curriculum change as well as supporting its implementation.

From an institutional perspective, there is much evidence from this project of the specific ways teachers have changed their practice; a concern with teaching and integrating grammar into text-based language teaching; an appreciation of the need to develop written as well as oral language skills; more sharply focused

planning leading towards specific learning outcomes; more concern with assessment and feedback on learner progress; the adoption of creative and flexible ways of attending to learners' needs while simultaneously working towards explicitly stated goals; a growing appreciation of the value of evaluating teaching programs; a greater sense of learning progression and learners' long-term goals through successive courses within the organisation and beyond. I am not suggesting that the process of change at the classroom level is complete, but I am suggesting that the need for institutional support in initiating, continuing and enhancing this process is unequivocal.

There is also ample evidence from a professional development perspective that teachers greatly value collaboration - ways of working together, rather than in isolation, to solve mutual teaching problems. The project teachers saw action research and the opportunity to work with curriculum developers, teacher educators and researchers as positive, contributing greatly to their understanding of the need for change and the means of achieving it. This raises the issue of the traditional dichotomy between research and practice and, I believe, proffers a challenge to researchers to seek ways of forming research partnerships with teachers, not as a means of furthering academic careers, but as a way of genuinely attempting to understand the feasibility of curriculum theory as it applies to practice.

Can action research go beyond the individual classroom to have a broader impact on the institution in which it takes place? In my view it can when it occurs in a collective way. The findings of this project have fed back into the institution in various ways. They have informed professional development processes across the participating states and for the AMEP nationally. They have also revealed what teachers are finding problematic in competency-based course design and where professional development activities should be targeted. They have also informed further curriculum development, as since mid 1995 new versions of the Certificate documents have included modifications to the competency statements drawn from the teachers' data.

Many of the teachers in this project began with philosophical reservations and pedagogical misgivings about changes being imposed from above (see Lukin, 1994). Being involved in a collaborative initiative reaffirmed their ability to find positive and workable solutions. I will leave it to the teacher I quoted at the beginning of this paper to voice a final arguement for collaborative action research:

> From the beginning of my participation in the project, I had a strong sense there were basic elements or principles which were fundamental to the daily decisions I made about what to teach. However, when the project began I could barely articulate them. This was thrown into sharp relief for me during discussions involving myself, one of the research coordinators and the other teacher from my centre who was participating in the project. I felt compelled to engage with the theoretical basis of the document. The outcome for

me has been a huge increase in my job satisfaction. The process of learning about a very rich theory of how we make meaning in language has been engaging in it own right. However, it is the challenge of exploring its practical applications that I find endlessly stimulating.

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Figure 1.

Competency *Stage 2*

11. Can write short recounts

Elements	Performance Criteria	Range of Variables	Examples of Texts/ Assessment Tasks
Purpose i. can understand purpose of text and write short recount	• conveys main ideas to reader	• familiar/relevant topics • minimum 3 paragraphs • recourse to dictionary if appropriate • if writing personal letter format/layout provided	**Texts** • Job history for application letters • Personal letters **Tasks** • Learners write letter to friend • Learners write about their previous jobs • Learners write a recount of an accident they have seen on a video • Learners write a recount of a recent workplace visit
Discourse Structure ii. can use appropriate beginning/ middle/end structure iii. can sequence events/information temporally to produce coherent text	• layout is appropriate and staging shows beginning, middle and end structure • sequences events/information temporally		
Grammar/Vocabulary iv. can use past tenses and other past markers v. can use appropriate conjunctive links vi. can construct multi-clause sentences vii. can use key vocabulary for topic	• uses past tenses and other past markers • uses mostly appropriate conjunctive links eg "first", "then" • constructs multi-clause sentences,2–3 clauses • uses appropriate key vocabulary for topic		
Graphology viii. can use appropriate spelling punctuation and legible script	• uses mostly standard spelling and punctuation, legible script		

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